

Fuel 4 Women



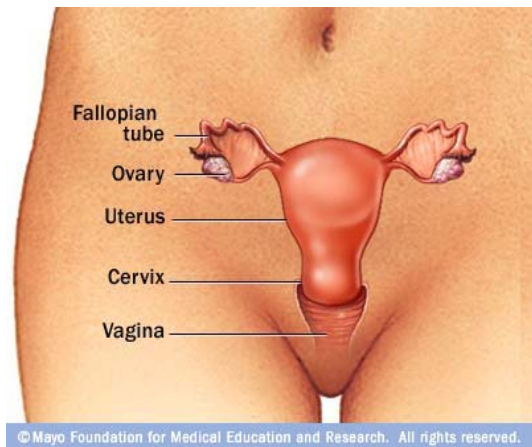
KSC/CCAFS HEALTH EDUCATION AND WELLNESS PROGRAM

Women's Reproductive Health May 2006

What is Reproductive Health?

Reproductive health is important in every woman's life. Reproductive health is not only having healthy menstrual cycles and pregnancies, but also preventing reproductive cancers including cervical, ovarian, and uterine cancers.

As we age, our needs begin to change. Our reproductive health is influenced by our menses, pregnancies, and even menopause. It is important to know and understand the preventative actions that can be taken to maintain good reproductive health throughout our life changes.



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Pap Smears / Gynecological Exams

A Pap smear, also called a Pap test, is a simple procedure that collects cells from your cervix — the lower, narrow end of your uterus. Named after its developer, George Papanicolaou, M.D., the test effectively detects not only cervical cancer, but also changes in your cervical cells that suggest cancer may develop in the future. Detecting these cells early is your first step in halting the possible development of cervical cancer.

Since women started having Pap smears more than 50 years ago, the number of deaths from cervical cancer has dropped dramatically. What was once the leading cause of cancer death for women in the United States, cervical cancer now ranks as No. 15 among cancer deaths. According to the American Cancer Society, about 3,700 women die each year of cervical cancer — a figure that could drop even further if more women had the Pap smear done on a regular basis.

If you get regular Pap smears, you substantially decrease your chances of getting cervical cancer. But even if you develop cervical cancer, the chances of a cure are as high as 90 percent — if discovered early. The Pap smear is the best tool to detect cervical cancer in its earliest stage.

HPV Testing

Human papilloma virus (HPV), one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STI's), is the primary cause of cervical cancer. At least eight out of every ten women who have ever had sex will get HPV at some time in their lives. HPV is most common in young women who are in their late teens or early 20's. HPV is spread by skin-to-skin contact during sex. It can be spread by all forms of sex—vaginal, oral, and anal.

If you are age 30 or older, you can have the HPV test with your Pap test as part of your normal health visit. Because HPV is so common in women younger than 30, an HPV test is not usually performed routinely unless the Pap test results are abnormal.

Quick Facts

- HPV is the primary cause of cervical cancer
- At least 8 out of every 10 women who have ever had sex will get HPV sometime in their lives.
- Depending on age, Pap smears are recommended every 1-3 years.
- Douching is common among women in the United States. It is estimated that 20 to 40 percent of American women aged 15 to 44 years douche regularly.



Is Douching Safe?

The word "douche" means to wash or soak in French. Douching is washing or cleaning out the vagina (also called the birth canal) with water or other mixtures of fluids. Usually douches are prepackaged mixes of water and vinegar, baking soda, or iodine. Women can buy these products at drug and grocery stores. The mixtures usually come in a bottle and can be squirted into the vagina through a tube or nozzle.

Women douche because they mistakenly believe it gives many benefits. In reality, douching may do more harm than good. Common reasons women give for using douches include:

- to clean the vagina
- to rinse away blood after monthly periods
- to get rid of odors from the vagina
- to avoid sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- to prevent pregnancy

Most doctors and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) suggest that women steer clear of douching. All healthy vaginas contain some bacteria and other organisms called the vaginal flora. The normal acidity of the vagina keeps the amount of bacteria low. But douching can change this delicate balance. This may make a woman more

prone to vaginal infections. Plus, douching can spread existing vaginal infections up into the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries.

Breast Health Education

The American Cancer Society recommends the following guidelines for finding breast cancer early in women without symptoms:

Mammogram: Women age 40 and older should have a mammogram every year and should continue to do so for as long as they are in good health. While mammograms can miss some cancers, they are still a very good way to find breast cancer.

Clinical breast exam: Women in their 20s and 30s should have a clinical breast exam (CBE) as part of a regular exam by a health expert, preferably every 3 years. After age 40, women should have a breast exam by a health expert every year. It might be a good idea to have the CBE shortly before the mammogram. You can use the exam to learn what your own breasts feel like.

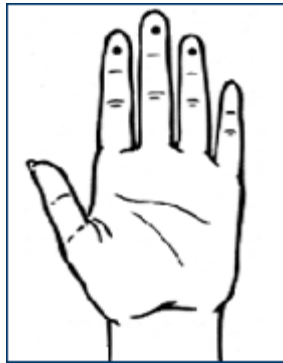
Breast awareness and breast self-exam (BSE): BSE is an option for women starting in their 20s. If you decide to do BSE, you should have your doctor or nurse check your method to make sure you are doing it right. If you do BSE on a regular basis, you get to know how your breasts normally feel. Then you can more easily notice changes. But it's OK not to do BSE or not to do it on a fixed schedule.

The most important thing is to see your doctor right away if you notice any of these changes: a lump or swelling, skin irritation or dimpling, nipple pain or the nipple turning inward, redness or scaliness of the nipple or breast skin, or a discharge other than breast milk. But remember that most of the time these breast changes are not cancer.

Women at high risk: Women with a higher risk of breast cancer should talk with their doctor about the best approach for them. This might mean starting mammograms when they are younger, having extra tests, or having more frequent exams.

How to Examine Your Breasts:

- Lie down and place your right arm behind your head. The exam is done while lying down, and not standing up, because when lying down the breast tissue spreads evenly over the chest wall and it is as thin as possible making it much easier to feel all the breast tissue.
- Use the finger pads of the 3 middle fingers on your left hand to feel for lumps in the right breast. Use overlapping dime-sized circular motions of the finger pads to feel the breast tissue.
- Use 3 different levels of pressure to feel all the breast tissue. Light pressure is needed to feel the tissue closest to the skin; medium pressure to feel a little deeper; and firm pressure to feel the tissue closest to the chest and ribs. A firm ridge in the lower curve of each breast is normal. If you're not sure how hard to press, talk with your doctor or nurse. Use each pressure level to feel the breast tissue before moving on to the next spot.



Move around the breast in an up and down pattern starting at an imaginary line drawn straight down your side from the underarm and moving across the breast to the middle of the chest bone.(sternum or breastbone).. Be sure to check the entire breast area going down until you feel only ribs and up to the neck or collar bone (clavicle).

There is some evidence to suggest that the up and down pattern (sometimes called the vertical pattern) is the most effective pattern for covering the entire breast and not missing any breast tissue.

Repeat the exam on your left breast, using the finger pads of the right hand. While standing in front of a mirror with your hands pressing firmly down on your hips, look at your breasts for any changes of size, shape, contour, or dimpling. (The pressing down on the hips position contracts the chest wall muscles and enhances any breast changes.)

Examine each underarm while sitting up or standing and with your arm only slightly raised so you can easily feel in this area. Raising your arm straight up tightens the tissue in this area and makes it very difficult to examine.

This procedure for doing breast self-exam represents changes in previous procedure recommendations. These changes represent an extensive review of the medical literature and input from an expert advisory group. There is evidence that the woman's position (lying down), area felt, pattern of coverage of the breast, and use of different amounts of pressure increase the sensitivity of BSE as measured with silicon models, and for CBE using patient models with known small non cancerous lumps in their breasts.

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- ♦ *Educating women about their health*
- ♦ *Encouraging women to act against disease*

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RESOURCES

Reproductive Health/Reproline
Johns Hopkins University
<http://www.reproline.jhu.edu/>

National Women's Health Resource Center
www.healthywomen.org

The National Women's Health Information Center
US Department of Health and Human Services
www.4women.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov